

# Senior-Senior Prom



**Drury High School  
North Adams, Massachusetts**

*Subject Area*  
Sociology

*Area of Service*  
Human Needs

*Grade Level*  
Twelfth Grade

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## In Brief

The senior sociology class traditionally examines issues related to the elderly in society through textbook readings. Students seeking greater understanding of the problems facing this population chose to relate to senior citizens first-hand. Students visited adult day care centers, senior citizen centers, and nursing homes. During these weekly visits, they played cards, exchanged stories, and witnessed first hand the concerns of senior citizens in today's society. In celebration of "bridging the gap between generations," the senior class and the senior citizens co-planned a Senior-Senior Prom.

## Learner Outcomes

Students learn to:

- Recognize the real world applications of sociological concepts;
- Develop problem solving skills, cooperative learning techniques, accountability procedures, and communication skills;
- Break down generational stereotypes and appreciate individuality; and
- Coordinate the myriad aspects of creating a large social event.

### MASSACHUSETTS CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK CONNECTIONS



This unit is aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Listed are the subject areas and the learning strands addressed:

#### English/Language Arts

Language strand: 1, 3, 5

Literature strand: 8, 9

Composition strand: 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25

Media strand: 26

#### History and Social Science

History strand: 1, 4, 5

## OVERVIEW

## The Need

With the awareness that senior citizens experience feelings of isolation and neglect, the sociology students decided to plan an event to address this problem. The students hoped to dispel stereotypes held by each group: teenagers are self-centered and even dangerous individuals; the elderly are irritable and out of touch with youth. The students needed a project that would address both the senior citizens' feelings about themselves and the youth of today.

## A CSL Response

In response to traditional preconceived perceptions, members of the senior class decide to celebrate the end of their senior year by hosting a Senior-Senior Prom. This project "kicks off" with the mailing of student letters to nursing homes, elderly day care centers, and elderly housing inviting senior citizens to a senior prom. In preparation for the prom, students and the senior citizens co-plan the event. They choose a theme, research old music and dances, canvass stores and community members for donations of prizes, purchase ingredients aligned with dietary restrictions, and collaborate with the culinary arts department to make refreshments. In addition, they arrange for transportation, research the building's handicapped accessibility and make any necessary adjustments. In the final stages of the project they hire a band, send invitations and decorate the high school gymnasium.

## Service Component

Throughout the school year, members of the sociology class examine the issues impacting the elderly through weekly visits to nursing homes or senior day care centers. During these visits students not only enrich the lives of the senior citizens, but the seniors citizens' dialogues provide the sociology students with primary research for testing their hypotheses surrounding the stereotyping of both adolescents and the elderly. As a result of this project two generations learn to bridge their gap in years, interests and experiences through informal conversation and students recognize that the elderly population is comprised of individual people with valued memories.

## Celebration

Each spring the senior sociology class hosts an annual senior prom for senior citizens at Drury High School as both a culmination to their year-long personal study of the aging and elderly in today's world and a celebration of new friendships cultivated through weekly visits. The theme of the prom varies from one year to the next, but the band always plays music from the senior citizens' era. A queen and her senior court are chosen and crowned during the evening's festivities. Teens and elders laugh, share stories, and fortify the friendships created as a result of this project. Students learn to care for others, be compassionate, and recognize that elders are good company as they examine the myths and realities about the elderly.

*Through my experiences in the recreational therapy department at the nursing home, I have learned many lessons that a classroom could not teach me. I learned compassion, sensitivity, and putting other people before yourself. As I grow up and leave Drury High School these lessons will help me in the world. Education cannot be limited to a few subjects. Responsibility and leadership have also been taught to me through Community Service Learning. Getting out into the community is exhilarating, and builds self-esteem . . .*

Grade 12 Student  
at Drury High School

## OUTCOMES

## Academic Gains

Students witnessed firsthand the connections between the concepts and theories presented in their sociology textbooks and the real world situations existing in nursing homes and adult day care centers. The ability to communicate effectively was a prerequisite in setting this project in motion. Prior to analyzing issues of loneliness, the awkwardness of making friends, and establishing a common ground from which two different generations could communicate, students needed to express their sincere interest in developing a friendship. Students recognized the importance of cooperative learning in completing various tasks from planning weekly activities to organizing the Senior-Senior Prom.

The high school seniors were accountable for their behavior within varied settings—their peer relationships and their senior relationship. Each relationship reflected the need to respect a generation of people with different values, opinions and memories. During weekly visits students became sensitive to the meaning derived from nuances of language, expressions, posture, gestures, and body movements of their partners. Finally, as the date of the Senior-Senior Prom approached, each partner mirrored a comfort zone of acceptance of one another while learning the dances of a "different" era, whether it be the polka of the 40's or the fast dance of the 90's.

## Societal Gains

This intergenerational project provided specific groups of students and senior citizens an opportunity to form their own conclusion about another generation. Through firsthand experiences, the participants began to ignore the stereotypes attached to age, whether it be young or old. These individuals developed a friendship based on respect for each other. Appreciation for each other's knowledge, skills, and interests was nurtured during weekly visits throughout the year. A celebration of these new friendships culminated in the Senior-Senior Prom held at Drury High School.

This event, the Senior-Senior Prom, provided the public a different view of the youth of today. The public was able to recognize this group of high school students as concerned and caring people. The high school students also realized that they were capable of making positive contributions to their community. In conclusion, both populations recognized themselves as valuable community contributors, capable of making a difference in the lives of others.

## Community Partners

In the initial planning stages of the Senior-Senior Prom project students mailed letters to nursing homes, elderly day care centers, and elderly housing inviting senior citizens to a senior prom. As a result, a working relationship was established between Drury High School and several agencies throughout the community. Due to the positive response from the Senior-Senior Prom project, barriers that isolated the high school from community agencies were removed, a dialogue was established and new projects are in the planning stage.



## Community Partners continued

The community partners involved in the Senior-Senior Prom project are listed below:

Willowood Nursing Home  
 Alzheimers Information Hotline  
 Council on Aging  
 Elder Services of Berkshire County  
 Elder Abuse Hotline  
 Northern Berkshire Community Coalition  
 Northern Berkshire Mental Health  
 Sweet Brook Nursing Home



### TIES TO THE MASSACHUSETTS CURRICULUM FRAMEWORKS

LEARNING STANDARDS/ OUTCOMES	ACTIVITY	ASSESSMENT
<b>History and Social Science</b> <b>HISTORY STRAND</b>		
<b>Standard 1:</b> Recognize how collaboration of different kinds of people, often with different motives, has accomplished important changes.	Design an event that collaborates with an aging population, a physically challenged population.	Compare pre and post-event reflections to assess changes in stereotypes.
<b>Standard 4:</b> Students understand the rights of individuals in conjunction with the ideals of community participation and public service.	Write an essay on bias and stereotypes based on "A Bed By the Window" and the movie "Driving Miss Daisy"	Essays are evaluated on coherence, a clearly main idea and supporting details.
<b>English/Language Arts</b> <b>LANGUAGE</b>		
<b>Standard 2:</b> Students will pose questions, listen to the ideas of others and contribute their own information or ideas in group discussions and interviews in order to acquire new knowledge.	Investigate through interviews, stories, music and folk tales from student's culture and from senior citizen's culture.	Rubric used to grade essay comparing and contrasting these types of expressions from two cultures.
<b>Standard 3:</b> Students will make oral presentations that demonstrate appropriate consideration of audience, purpose, and the information to be conveyed.	Select an aspect of culture such as beliefs, values, religion, dramas, art, music and dress. Show how differences can cause conflict.	Create a chart showing what might be done to avoid intergenerational conflicts.

## LESSON PLAN Understanding Aging in American Society

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### Objective

Having examined the characteristics associated with biological, physiological, psychological and social aging, students will write a reflective essay explaining the connection between characteristics of the elderly, the social problems confronting this population in the United States and stereotyping.

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### Learning Standards

Social Studies: History

Standard 4: Society, Diversity, Commonality, and the Individual

English/Language Arts: Composition Strands 19, 24

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### Materials

Mother and Daughter story

List of Web sites

Computers with internet access

Text: *Societies in Focus: Introduction to Sociology*, Third Edition, Thompson & Hickey, published by Longman

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### Procedure

#### Part 1

Have students list the first twenty words that come to mind to describe elderly in three minutes. At the end of three minutes ask the students to stop writing and circle all the positive descriptors listed. Discuss the outcome. How many positive descriptors were listed?

#### Part 2

Have students read the first part of the story about Rose and Joan. Discuss the question at the end of the section. Following the discussion, read Part II of the story and discuss it.

#### Part 3

Research using a variety of sources:

Explore the net for information about age and the elderly

Use your favorite search engine and type <Gerontology>

Go to <http://www.seniorlink.com> and <http://www.aarp.org>. Find three things you feel senior citizens should know to safeguard their safety

Create a bulletin board display with warnings that can be placed in a senior center

#### Part 4

Product, Performance, and Presentation

Each student participates in a class discussion sharing three pieces of new information and assisting in the creation of a bulletin board.

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### Assessment

Having examined the social issues impacting the aged, students will write an essay comparing and contrasting their views on the aging before and after completing their research.

### MOTHER ROSE & DAUGHTER JOAN (PART 1)

Rose called her grown daughter, Joan, to help her solve a problem. She revealed that two very nice people had visited her recently and invited her to visit the senior citizen center located a few blocks away from her home. Rose said that she had heard the center was attractive and well run and many senior citizens took advantage of the hot meals that were served there and the recreational activities that were offered. They also had exercise classes and did arts and crafts.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE ROSE, AN EIGHTY YEAR OLD WOMAN WHO LIVES ALONE IF YOU WERE HER DAUGHTER?

### MOTHER ROSE & DAUGHTER JOAN (PART 2)

Joan told her mother that the senior citizen sounded very nice and that she should probably go. Rose revealed that she was feeling very guilty because she knew they needed help there and if they couldn't find anybody else to help serve the food and teach the exercise lessons, she would come and help out on an emergency basis. She really didn't want to commit a great deal of time to volunteering there because she was so busy.

WHAT ASSUMPTIONS DID THE TWO VERY NICE PEOPLE MAKE ABOUT ROSE? WHAT ASSUMPTIONS DID YOU MAKE? HOW WERE YOU WRONG?

## TIMELINE

### September

Introduction to CSL projects. Students identify a community need of interest

### October

Establish contacts with community agencies. Make initial contact with individual community agency

### November

Planning and implementing project that satisfies needs. Connecting project to curriculum identified in textbook.

### December

Maintaining a reflective journal describing weekly visitations

### January thru March

Maintain reflective journal. Establish subcommittees for food, decoration, transportation, program, photography, public relations, and entertainment

### April

Present paper on project. Assess own success at reaching established goals

### May

Senior-Senior Prom

## Assessment

In this project students completed a variety of assessments, such as reflective journals and short open response answers. Students maintained reflective journals throughout the school year in response to five basic questions: What difference have we really made? What have I learned? Where might I apply this new knowledge elsewhere in my life? How has my model of the world changed and what does that mean to my life? What have I learned about myself, about those I served, and about academic skills and content? Following each visitation, the student chose one of the five questions to answer relating to the day's events. Later students edited their journal writing and transformed it into one of the following literary forms: poem, cartoon, speech, short story, web, song, drawing, letter, flow chart, and journal entry. In addition to the reflective journals students complete a short open response test on their service, answering questions such as: "What 10 words would you use to describe your CSL experience?" or "What have you learned about yourself, about those you served and about being a risktaker?" Finally, students, seniors and agencies complete a self-evaluation of the project validating its successes and suggesting possible areas of improvement for the next year.

### CONNECTING TO MCAS: OPEN RESPONSE QUESTION



*Understanding Meaning in Context : read the following paragraph. Identify the meaning of the specified word in the context of this paragraph. Write a one paragraph response to the question below.*

Our society offers great diversity in race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, and other social characteristics. Studying these differences provides us with an excellent opportunity to know one another and gain insight into how society operates. We can learn much, for example, from people who experience social marginality -being excluded from mainstream society—such as racial or ethnic minorities, some women, the poor, the homeless, older persons, people with disabilities, and so on. Their social marginality constantly reminds them of how difficult it is for them to succeed in a society that treats them like outsiders through prejudice and discrimination. On the other hand, we can also see how the social advantages enjoyed by mainstream society make it easier for them to succeed. In short, the study of social diversity can reveal the ways in which society influences the lives of different individuals including our own. (Thio, Alex. *Sociology*, Fifth Edition, Addison Wesley)

The phrase in this passage, "social marginality" means:

A) discrimination B) diversity C) isolation D) incompetence

How did hosting a Senior-Senior Prom increase your knowledge and understanding of how society influences the lives of older people?

## Challenges

The Senior-Senior Prom project has three main challenges: student involvement, elderly involvement, and creating a compatible match between a student and a senior citizen. First, unlike other classroom activities, a CSL project is built on student empowerment. This may be the most challenging aspect of this project for some individuals. Will students choose a theme for the Senior-Senior Prom on time? Who will make the decorations? Have the students booked a musician? Does each student group have a plan for next week's visit?

Without the senior citizen population agreeing to attend this senior prom, the project would not take place. How do you initiate enthusiasm from a population who may avoid even minimal contact with teenagers?

## Solutions

The classroom teacher needs to acknowledge his/her anxiety attached to facilitating a project versus controlling a project. Student directed projects require a teacher to practice facilitation skills: provide students with checkpoints, require all forms of writing to be shared with an outside audience to be proofed by the teacher, provide possible community contacts, or sample scripts for phone calls.

Both the students and the senior citizens need to develop a relationship over time. This cannot be accomplished in four or five meetings. The partnership between the senior and the senior citizen needs to begin early in the school year. Finally, the student and the senior citizen should be a compatible match.





## Extending the Vision

Due to the success of this project, local agencies are anxious to continue their partnership with the high school. The Senior-Senior Prom project has been in existence for three years now. Each year this project grows in size and enthusiasm. It exposes students to the differences in generations, and provides each student with the opportunity to eliminate the stereotypes attached to both the young and elderly.

This interdisciplinary project involves learning standards from both the English/Language Art and History and Social Sciences curriculum frameworks. Culinary arts, music, and technology curriculum connections have expanded the program's student involvement. Culinary arts helps plan the meal for the Senior-Senior Prom. The music department assists students in researching the music and dance steps of the senior citizens' era. Finally, the technology department provides all the technical support necessary for programs, flyers, and any other mailings. The positive outcomes from this project include not only deterring age bias, but also improving the school's standing in the community. Community agencies are now willing to discuss, plan, and pilot projects to address other needs. This event could expand to include the entire senior class.

## IN CONCLUSION: School's Role in the Community

This project clearly demonstrates the value of extending "the walls of the classroom" to provide an authentic means of teaching students community-based content. How else would one effectively teach adolescents about the issues facing the elderly, without involving the elderly themselves? Connecting the seniors at Drury High School with the senior citizens in their community broadened the learning of content to include the emotional understanding of the societal pressures that cause the stereotyping of others. In addition, members of the community develop an interest in their local schools.

This project provides the opportunity to join the senior population, who has acquired real world knowledge over time, with adolescents, who have more to learn about life. This relationship benefits both populations. The positive outcomes of the Senior-Senior Prom are visible to the entire community with the enthusiastic support of this annual event.